

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE November 4, 2003

CONTACT: Laura Orlando, (617) 524-7258, orlando@riles.org

EPA ADMITS LACK OF CERTAINTY ON SAFETY OF SEWAGE SLUDGE, SIGNALS APPARENT POLICY SHIFT

*Groups say admission necessitates immediate ban on
disposal through land application*

WASHINGTON- Environmental, farm, and food safety organizations are welcoming what appears to signal a significant policy shift in the EPA's position on the land application of sewage sludge. On October 29, Paul Gilman, EPA spokesman and Assistant Administrator for Research and Development, stated this apparent policy shift on sewage sludge when he told CBS Evening News, "I can't answer it's perfectly safe. I can't answer it's not safe." This shift came two weeks after EPA's announcement that it would not regulate dioxin contamination in sewage sludge.

"EPA's lack of certainty about the safety of sewage sludge necessitates an immediate ban on land application of sludge," said Laura Orlando, a spokesperson for 73 organizations that petitioned the EPA last month to halt the land application of sewage sludge. "Land applying sludge is a dangerous disposal method that is creating untold harm to human health and the environment in communities across America."

The EPA's admission that there is no scientific consensus on the safety of land applied sewage sludge is consistent with a June 1997 opinion of the federal Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals (Scalamandre et. al. v. Kaufman et. al.) that stated: "The conclusion the evidence at trial suggests is that experts have yet to reach a consensus on the safety of land application of sludge."

For over a decade, EPA has promoted growing food on land contaminated with sewage sludge. Independent research shows that sewage sludge contains numerous hazardous materials, including but

not limited to, the toxic heavy metals lead and arsenic, PCBs, dioxins, and other hazardous organic materials. Although EPA now admits it does not know if it is safe, the practice of disposing of sludge on land resulted in over five million dry tons of this hazardous material being spread on American soil and crop land last year alone, causing irreparable harm to public health, livestock, and the environment.

In June 2003, a court in Augusta, Georgia, ruled that sewage sludge caused the deaths of 300 dairy cows on the Boyceland Dairy farm. The cows died after eating hay grown on sludge that was in compliance with EPA's rules (Boyceland Dairy v. City of Augusta, Richmond County Super. Ct.). The 73 environmental, farm, and food safety organizations that asked EPA to place an immediate ban on the land application of sewage sludge due to the serious health and safety concerns associated with this practice, cited the Georgia court ruling in their petition.

In 1998 and 2000, EPA's Office of the Inspector General investigated the agency's program to regulate the land application of sewage sludge and found that it was not protective of public health or the environment.

The transcript to the October 29 CBS Evening News broadcast, "Sewage Fertilizer Under Fire," is available at <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2003/10/29/eveningnews/main580816.shtml>. The sewage sludge petition is available at <http://www.centerforfoodsafety.org/>.